

**Accelerating the Second Movement:
Establishing an Intensive Program of Growth after Two or Three Cycles**

When the Universal House of Justice in its 20 October 2008 message called for the 41 regional conferences, it voiced the prayer that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh might “be granted the courage to make whatever sacrifices are needed to ensure the resounding success of the Plan.” Nowhere have those sacrifices been more evident than in the remarkable stories of homefront pioneers who were inspired by the conferences to arise, leave their homes, and move to clusters where they could contribute to the “resounding success” of the Five Year Plan. In previous issues we have shared the experiences of homefront pioneers advancing their clusters. What is especially noteworthy about the stories that follow is that the dedicated and systematic efforts of homefront pioneers, “experienced in institute programs,” led to such a healthy and coherent pattern of growth that intensive programs of growth were launched in clusters after only two or three cycles of activity.

As inspiring and instructive as these stories are, what is particularly heartening is that they represent only a small sampling of the extraordinary efforts being carried out by homefront pioneers in many parts of the globe. They have indeed learned “through consistent, systematic action how to establish a rhythm of growth” that leads to an intensive program of growth, and to do so in an accelerated manner.

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Cameroon

Following is an account of a pioneer whose dedication, perseverance, and reliance on divine assistance, coupled with close collaboration with the institutions of the Faith, enabled her to help establish an intensive program of growth in a remarkably short period of time. This pioneer was inspired to volunteer as a short-term pioneer at the regional conference held in Yaoundé, Cameroon in November 2008. She met with the friends from the Kalfou cluster while at the conference and together they resolved to launch an intensive program of growth by Riḍván 2009. Leaving behind her family, she left almost immediately for Kalfou.

I left Yaoundé and arrived at my post a few days later, accompanied by the Auxiliary Board member and a member of the Regional Bahá'í Council of the Far North. I was well received and everything seemed to point to victory. The first morning I woke up very early and, after some prayers, together with a travelling teacher, I set out to support the teaching campaign that had been launched earlier. We visited a neighborhood that is located 4 kilometers away from the Center. There was a big crowd—children, old people, and youth. I was very happy! We started study circles. The next day we went to another neighborhood where we also enrolled the friends in study circles. On the third day, we visited another village and did the same, and afterward, the travelling teacher had to return home.

All the friends from the Kalfou cluster with whom we had consulted at the conference left the teaching work. They apologized, saying that they had to work and earn a living. The others left the village. The bolder ones said that I was wasting my time, that it was not possible to raise up a Bahá'í community, that the

village is animist, that in the past the chief had driven religious people out, that no one, not even the Muslims who are here, has any time, and that, on top of that, I am a woman, and in the Tupuri tradition women cannot speak in front of men. Basically, nothing was possible!

After listening to the friends attentively, I asked them why they had pledged before God to work toward the Plan, yet outside of Yaoundé they thought the opposite. As no answer was given to my question, I told them that nothing could prevent God from achieving His Plan and that, as long as the Universal House of Justice had approved it, everything was going to be all right, even if no one arose. Following this, a huge force seized my whole being; I have never felt this in my life! And that force remained present throughout the whole project.

Two of the friends agreed to join me day and night in carrying out the expansion and consolidation work. For three weeks, either one or the other would help me to hold study circles. Great crises arose. The major challenge was the high rate of illiteracy and the need to bring people into the sequence of courses. I quickly analyzed the situation and concluded that I had to consult with the Auxiliary Board member and some Regional Council members. As we were consulting, I asked to be assisted by someone from outside the cluster who spoke French and the Tupuri language. So, the Board member asked a particular believer from a nearby area to help us. He came from his village each morning for 10 days. After the next reflection meeting, we launched the first institute campaign following the teaching campaign, which enabled us to enroll more than 30 people.

When the Counsellor called me to ask how the work was progressing, I told him that there were a lot of people at the grass roots, but nothing was advancing because most of them were illiterate. I will never forget his firm but assuring voice telling me, “Madam, you did not come to Kalfou to start a network of intellectuals. You must find a way to help the friends to advance.” I was ill, stressed, scared, and I cried. I was sad, but there was a voice, “I must continue!” I stayed up all night praying fervently, and the next morning, the Almighty inspired me! The miracle was that there were a lot of people at the reflection meeting, among whom were seekers. But during the consultation when we talked about having an institute campaign that would last two weeks, the friends did not agree to it. They each gave reasons why they were not going to be able to take part in the campaign.

Finally, one of the seekers who became a Bahá’í after that consultation stood up during the session and said that he was ready to come every day from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and his friend said that he would join him. Some other friends timidly agreed to also participate, making a total of 15 people who had pledged to take part in that first institute campaign. However, when the day for starting the institute courses came, only five people showed up.

Once we reached Ruhi Institute Book 7, one of the new believers, who had remained silent throughout the first six courses and who I thought had not understood anything, surprised me. He began reading correctly, whereas before he had had difficulty. He would explain things and make interesting comments. When we went out for a home visit to his family, he spoke and said things in a language that I felt deeply in my heart, and this is how I came to understand his mother tongue. That friend was set ablaze!

In order to carry out our plan, that same new believer took us from one village to the next, which was not easy. Only the illiterate adults responded to the message. It was another challenge because we needed to find people for a second institute campaign who could read. Despite all our efforts, when analyzing the situation, we realized that we were going to miss the date for the launch of our intensive program of growth. Once again, the voice of the Counsellor on the telephone said, “Go to all the schools in the area, talk to the teachers, students, and directors.” The wonderful thing was that we were all united and we shared the same vision all the time. When we went to one school to talk to the teachers, the director did not agree. Fortunately, however, we already had a few students from that school taking part in the classes. They spoke with all the other 17-year-old students, and many of them came to join us. At the end, we counted 20 people for this second institute campaign.

As was the case for the first campaign, on day one only a few people showed up. This was awful because we had put all our energy into it, and we were tired and disappointed. But the crisis did not last long. We consulted and decided to carry out the institute campaign at the same time as the teaching campaign. We revisited the places where we had taught; nothing! We sat under a tree, and people passing by started to ask us what we were doing all day under a tree. We replied that God had launched a program in their village and that we are searching for pure souls in order to carry out this plan, that we did not have much time left, and that if they were interested, they could come and study a course for two weeks. They joined us! Others would stop us on the road and tell us that they knew that I was in the village and that they wanted to know the reason for my presence. So we explained to them the importance of the program. In this way, through crisis and victory, we managed to launch our intensive program of growth.

I could not believe that these friends could achieve such a feat! After recognizing the Blessed Beauty, they arose to organize a celebration for the launch of the intensive program of growth. Almost 250 people attended! What touched me the most was the extent of the consultation held with the newly declared friends and the representatives of the institutions—the Counsellor, the Auxiliary Board member, and the member of the Regional Council. In short, I have understood the importance of working together in consultation and particularly the importance of obeying the institutions. I will never forget this experience! We had 110 declarations; two Local Spiritual Assemblies were elected; all the core activities were under way; and in the village all the children recite the prayer “O God, guide me, protect me....”

Nepal

The experience in the Chitwan cluster demonstrates how united efforts, bolstered by the placement of an effective pioneer, can work miracles. This achievement is especially gratifying in that many of the new, active believers come from a marginalized, indigenous minority group which previously had little or no representation among the ranks of believers.

The Chitwan cluster was essentially a “D” cluster with a few believers on the membership list but no activity. It was chosen to be the focus of an intensive teaching campaign as part of an intensive institute course at a central location. Within about a month after the campaign, a short-term homefront pioneer settled in an unopened village in the cluster where she resided with relatives. Her goal was to stay for three months and during that time to establish the institute

process. Within weeks she had begun a study circle and a regular devotional gathering, attracting primarily students. They would come to her daily after school for two hours. She also began a children's class with 12 children.

By the end of a little more than three weeks, the members of the study circle completed Book 1 and took up Book 2. Home visits were then carried out by the participants. Three weeks later, the study circle moved on to Book 3 and began to observe and assist the previously established children's class. This book was finished in just under three weeks and so the friends started Book 4. When the eight participants in the study circle were ready to study Books 6 and 7, they were sent to a central location for training where they completed them intensively within about two weeks.

After these eight enthusiastic friends returned home from their training, they quickly took the Faith to nearby villages where they started study circles and children's classes. When family members heard their children sing Bahá'í songs and recite Bahá'í prayers, they were impelled to meet with the Bahá'í teachers and tutors to learn more about what they were teaching their children because they liked what they heard very much. This presented many opportunities to teach the families. The Faith began to expand very rapidly in the area. The believers started receiving requests to conduct new study circles in other villages.

The believers in the Lalitpur cluster, which already had an intensive program growth, decided at the regional conference in New Delhi to support the activities in Chitwan and to help the friends there achieve their aim of establishing an intensive program of growth. It was determined at the conference that the launch should take place by Ridván 2009, and the believers from Lalitpur wasted no time in visiting on weekends and assisting the pioneer and other friends in Chitwan to achieve that goal. This support was mutual; friends from Chitwan also helped with teaching and home visit campaigns in Lalitpur.

The goal was met on 11 April 2009 with 115 friends present to celebrate the launch of the intensive program of growth. Within the first two days of the expansion phase, 20 new believers were enrolled!

United Kingdom

Situated 12 hours away by boat from the Scottish mainland, the ruggedly beautiful, treeless Shetland Islands has a total population of 23,000 and only 37 Bahá'ís. Two youth from England arose to serve as homefront pioneers, relocating to this remote cluster just before the London conference, where the friends from the Shetlands set the ambitious goal of moving their cluster from "C" to "A" in less than three cycles.

The pioneers set out to accompany the friends in establishing core activities and involving more participants from the wider community. They constantly returned to the guidance about the Five Year Plan and to the institute courses. They found ways to make friends and teach the Faith. One of them started a basketball club.

The institutions of the Faith have given focused attention to these islands. The Auxiliary Board member makes monthly journeys, usually staying for a week while she accompanies the friends in service, studies guidance with them, visits their homes, and helps them make plans. Between visits, her telephone consultations with the young pioneers assist them to follow through on their plans. The Regional Council channeled resources and dispatched its members to visit, consult, and encourage the friends. Devoted and capable travelling teachers have lent their

assistance. A three-month summer teaching project enabled 13 youth from across the United Kingdom, all trained and experienced, to give shorter periods of service to assist this cluster.

Friends in the cluster commented that the homefront pioneers “brought love and energy” and that they were “focused and good role models.” They “helped people to become energized” and were “well trained in the core activities and able to initiate them.”

One of the pioneers said that at first he found things difficult in a new environment where he knew no one. But things soon changed. He said joyfully, “It has been the best year of my life.” The other pioneer wrote, “The more I try to give the presentation, the more I feel like a new Bahá’í! I wish I could properly convey to you what’s going on here and what I am learning, because it is unlike anything I’ve ever experienced. You are so right; it is such a privilege to be able to serve in this way.”

Between March and August 2009 the number of individuals actively engaged in the work of expansion and consolidation has increased from 9 to 19, the number of seekers attending core activities has increased from 27 to 40, and there have been 5 new enrollments. A new children’s class, a new junior youth group, and 5 new study circles have started. And the friends are on track to launch their intensive program of growth by this November!

India

A well-prepared homefront pioneer can affect the lives of many people and become the catalyst to rapidly accelerate the development of a community. One such sterling example is recounted below.

A curious 16-year-old noticed a group of people in another village studying together. When he inquired about what they were doing, he became intrigued by the quotations they were discussing and asked the tutor if a similar course could be held in his own village. He and the tutor arranged to carry out a 22-day institute campaign, and he made certain that his friends and relatives attended. However, this same youth was unable to attend the sessions regularly. He was determined to go through the full sequence of courses properly and was sent to the residential intensive institute courses held at Panchgani.

The experience of this youth at Panchgani proved to be extremely useful because there the service component was emphasized, enabling him and his fellow participants to build different capacities. During his time there, that youth resolved to give three months of service to the Faith when he completed the sequence. After only a few days back home with his family, he left to serve as a short-term pioneer in a neighboring cluster.

In the beginning, this stalwart youth faced many challenges at his post. The participants of the first study circle he started were not serious. Then with another Bahá’í he taught the Faith to 10 people in a different locality. They started a study circle for those 10 and finished Book 1 in four days, but the participants did not attend regularly. Then they started having the classes weekly. Six participants went through the sequence of courses up to Book 6. Slowly he was learning to keep the participants motivated to go through the program.

This young pioneer also made sure that, along with studying the text of each book, his participants carried out acts of service. Thus, when they finished Book 1, he asked them to start devotional gatherings. After Book 3, he encouraged them to start children’s classes. Some of them joined him in teaching while going through Book 6.

Then the pioneer started another study circle in a third locality. There were four participants in this study circle who moved up through Book 3. Consequently, within months, this pioneer was directly working with 10 people: six in Book 6 and four in Book 3. But that is not the complete circle of influence of this inspiring young man—through those 10 people he was able to influence the lives of more than 100 others! The total activities established by participants of his study circles included 6 regular devotional gatherings, 3 children's classes, and 1 additional study circle, which all together attracted a total of 104 participants. In addition, many of these friends are now taking part in teaching teams during collective teaching campaigns.

Clearly, the consecrated efforts of one individual had the power to change a community. His three months of service turned into nine, and in the end he decided not to leave his post until an intensive program of growth had been firmly established.

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